

Specialist/Advanced Standing MSW Practicum FAQs

Q: I keep seeing this term. What is a “Specialist” student?

A: A specialist student is a student in their second year of practicum. This includes Advanced Standing students.

Q: What is the purpose of field education?

A: Field education is an integral part of the social work curriculum and is considered its signature pedagogy. The field education component is facilitated under the direction and supervision of a ***field instructor***. The field instructor is an agency-based licensed social worker or other mental health professional with practice experience who has been vetted and approved by the College of Social Work to provide field instruction. Field education is an opportunity for students to integrate and apply theories they learn in classroom with actual practice with individuals, families, groups, and larger systems. This will develop the skills necessary to competently intervene at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Q: Are practicum internships paid?

A: No, while about 65-70% of specialist-level agencies have traditionally provided financial support, many will not. **Here is why:** Field practicum is a class. As with any other class for which you pay tuition, the goal is to provide you with a valuable learning experience. However, unlike other classes, the focus is on applied social work practice and integration.

This is often confusing for students because it seems like "work" to go to an agency and provide services. Some students refer to this as “non-socially just”, “contrary to social work values”, “exploitive” or “free labor” However, field practicum internships are strictly differentiated from "work" and they meet fair labor standards (FLSA) thought its educational focus, monitoring, supervision, reporting requirements and structure.

Practicum activities and student roles are separate and distinct from "employment," which is why most agencies will not provide a "stipend." For more information regarding federal internship standards please review the following: [U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act](#). Our social work accrediting body, CSWE, has also released a statement regarding stipends that can be provided upon request.

In summary, it is best to assume that your practicum agency will not offer a stipend and to budget your timing and financial resources accordingly. If you have financial concerns, please reach out to the [University of Utah Office of Financial Aid](#)

Q: How is my practicum placement determined?

A: Students will complete and submit a field application. Students will complete this application and submit it, with an updated resume to their assigned *faculty field liaison* (the same one you are currently working with) The field liaison is a College of Social Work faculty member or instructor who has extensive social work practice experience. Rising specialist students will be given the option of meeting with their practicum coordinator in a group format during the month of February (unless a request is made via email to meet privately). Some agencies require that you apply directly to them for consideration. These agencies are listed in our Practicum Canvas page. **Please pay attention to application deadlines! They happen fast!** Students are expected to adhere to the placement procedures as outlined in the Policy Handbook and in the Specialist Practicum Info Session recording and PPT PDF and cannot secure placements outside of this process.

MSW Online Students who reside outside of Utah or in an area without approved agency placements, may be asked to assist in locating an agency with assistance from your practicum coordinator. However, practicum coordinators will support students throughout the process.

Q: I am an Advanced Standing student entering practicum. What should I expect?

A: Advanced Standing students will receive an email to their UMAIL (or your personal email if you are not currently a University of Utah student) detailing who you will be working with during your field placement experience. This individual will reach out to you regarding a meeting. You will also need to complete the Practicum Application and submit your resume. On this application, students will list their top agency preferences as well as any agencies they have applied to through the direct application process.

Q: Is placement in one of my top ten agencies guaranteed?

A: While every effort is made to place students in one of their top ten selections, it

cannot be guaranteed. However, practicum coordinators will work diligently to align students interests with placements.

Q: I am in the Evening MSW program, am I guaranteed placement in an agency that will work with my schedule?

A: Students in the Evening MSW program will be prioritized for placement in agencies that can provide evening and weekend hours, and every effort will be made to accommodate students with this requirement. However, agencies providing evening and weekend hours are limited, and change year to year, so placement in an agency with evening and weekend hours cannot be guaranteed.

Q: What do I do after I have received an email with my field agency referral?

A: *For students that do not apply directly to agencies*After students receive an email from the Office of Field Education with information regarding the agency to which they are referred for placement, (on or around the 17th of March) they are required to contact that agency to request a pre-placement interview. Some agencies are agreeable to phone or virtual interviews for students who are unable to interview in person due to geographical distance or national health emergencies. Students should consider this a professional interview: dress appropriately, bring an updated resume and be prepared to discuss, and ask appropriate questions.

Contact with agencies should happen within 7 days of receiving the agency referral from the Office of Field Education.

Q: Does one way of finalizing practicum placements apply to ALL placements?

A: No, there are a handful of agencies that require a separate, direct application. Students interested in these placements (a list of these agencies is included on this Canvas site will: 1) complete the agency application; and 2) interview with the agency before final selections are made *by the agency*. It is still critical that students communicate to their practicum coordinator their intent to apply to one or more of these agencies and let their liaison know if you were selected and in acceptance of this placement by the deadline set forth. Students can apply to one or more of these agencies.

Q: Can I arrange my own field placement?

A: No. It is the policy of the College of Social Work that all referrals of students must be made by the Field Education staff. Of course, MSW online students living outside of Utah, or in areas without placements will work collaboratively with their practicum coordinator to identify a suitable placement in the area in which they reside.

It should be noted that students may suggest to their practicum coordinator a potential agency, but may not pursue a placement on their own. For detailed instructions on obtaining a field placement, please refer to the BSW and MSW Field Manuals.

Q: I am already employed at a social work agency. Can I do my field placement there?

A: Students who are interested in completing an employment-based field placement must complete a separate application and get prior approval from the Office of Field Education. Students who are proposing to use their place of employment as their field site must follow the procedures outlined in the Employment Based Field Placement Policy, in the application and in the MSW Policy Handbook. While students can propose an internship in the agency in which they are employed, they cannot count any hours in their employment capacity as internship hours. The work and schedule must be strictly differentiated.

Q: Can I change my placement after I have already started?

A: Students cannot resign from a field placement. Any change in placement requires the involvement of, and approval from the Office of Field Education and is permitted only in extreme circumstances.

Q: When does my MSW field placement begin and end?

A: Concurrent (fall and spring) field placements typically begin the first week of classes in the fall and end on the last day of classes in the spring. Summer block placements begin the first week of classes and end the last week of classes.

Q: Can I begin my field placement before the beginning of the semester-perhaps in the summer?

A: There are circumstances that may require a student to complete some hours in the semester prior to officially enrolling in field. Students are allowed to complete up to 50 hours* in advance for things such as orientation, onboarding, trainings, shadowing and observing. However, students are not permitted to provide any direct services to clients during this period.

**Rising specialist students doing a summer block placement are allowed to do up to 100 hours during the preceding spring semester.*

Q: If I exceed my hours, can I discontinue my placement early?

A: No, students are expected to attend practicum for the duration of the contracted period. Any exceptional and extenuating circumstances that might disrupt this schedule must be discussed well in advance with the field instructor and practicum coordinator.

Q: Can I do my field placement with all evening and/or weekend hours?

A: It is expected that the majority of placement time will be completed during regular business hours, although arrangements for some placement hours on weekends and evenings may be possible as long as a supervisor is available.

Q: Can I complete my placement during the summer?

A: There are a limited number of summer block placements available. However, a full time PLUS commitment is required so this should be carefully considered.

Q: What happens during school breaks/snow days and other holidays?

A: The academic calendar lists the holidays and school vacation days during which students are not required to be in field placement. However, any extended breaks such as winter breaks must be discussed well in advance with the field instructor to ensure continuity of client care. *Please review the BSW or MSW Manuals for more detailed information regarding the Policies related to holidays, vacations, illness and inclement weather.*

Q: How do I document my field hours?

A: Students document field hours in IPT using the monthly time logs. These are submitted to your field liaison every five weeks and must be signed by your field instructor.

Q: Will I be able to find a placement close to my home?

A: The Office of Field Education offers opportunities for placements in several geographic areas throughout Utah. Students should indicate their preferred area in the Practicum Application.

Q: How many internship hours are required?

A: It varies by program and year. See below:

- **MSW 2nd year “Specialist” = 550 (approximately 18.2 hours per week)**

Students’ weekly schedules are negotiated between the student and agency field instructor.

Q: Is there a minimum number of hours I need to work per week?

A: Yes, students must work a minimum of 12 hours per week. It should be noted that if a student does not meet the required total number of hours (perhaps pursuant to an accommodation or other extenuating circumstance), they will receive an I, and may need to incur the cost associated with extending practicum into a 3rd semester.

Q: Will I be placed with the population of my choice?

A: In the MSW second year, you will participate in selecting your own field placement with the area of focus you have identified.

Q: What should I do if I have problems in my field placement?

A: If you have problems with your Field Instructor or in the placement, you are encouraged to handle concerns directly on your own in the field placement and notify

your practicum coordinator. Please refer to the MSW Field Education Policy Handbook for more information.

Q: Does the University of Utah provide liability insurance?

A: Yes, the University of Utah provides malpractice insurance. However, in accordance with Section U.C.A. 1953 Section Q (3), if you live outside of Utah, or are referred to an agency outside of Utah, you will be required to have supplemental insurance through the NASW (www.socialworkers.org) or another professional malpractice entity. When applicable, additional information about supplemental information will be provided by our office.

Field Performance Expectations

Q: How often should I meet with my Field Instructor for supervision?

A: CSWE accreditation standards mandate that you have a minimum of 1 hour of weekly face-to-face supervision (in-person, virtual or hybrid) with your BSW or MSW Field Instructor.

Q: Will my field placement have an organized, structured set of tasks lined up for me to practice all of the required social work competencies?

A: Some agencies will, others will not. You will be challenged to enhance your own learning needs by working with your field instructor and practicum coordinator to identify tasks that will address the competencies. Your *Learning Plan* will guide you in this process.

Q: How many of the CSWE competencies do I have to demonstrate to be considered successful in the field placement?

A: You must demonstrate satisfactory mastery of ALL competencies by the end of the second semester of the field placement. Receiving a “1” in any competency related behavior will result in a NC/E for the class.

Q: Do I have to follow all of my agency’s policies, even though I’m a student?

A: Yes, you are expected to follow ALL policies and procedures of your field placement agency. Students terminated for non-compliance with agency policies, the NASW Code of Ethics, the University of Utah Standards for Behavior, laws and or statutes, may be at risk of termination from their field placement. Termination from field may result in a NC/E grade for the field.

Q: What if I am unhappy with my field placement?

A: We certainly hope you will be happy, but if you are not, please consult with your field liaison for guidance. This is a graduate level, professional program that requires considerable responsibility and adaptability. We hope that you will make every effort to work through the initial transition and address any concerns directly and

professionally with your field liaison and instructor. *Also, we will only refer you to three agencies per semester, regardless of circumstance.*

Field Education Course

Q: Do I have to attend a Field Practicum class in addition to practicum?

A: Yes, a Canvas based practicum seminar (typically a virtual webinar) is a mandatory core component of the field education process and provides an integrative process where you join your peers to discuss your learning experiences, examine the connection of the classroom material and competencies to practice, and reflect on your personal and professional development. The course is facilitated via CANVAS and IPT. You will register for 6511 and 6512

Q: How am I evaluated by my Field Instructor?

A: At the end of each field semester, your Field Instructor will complete a student Field Evaluation that measures your performance. This evaluation is one component of your semester grade. Students must receive a 3 or higher in 80% of competency related behaviors (and no “1”s in final semester) to receive a passing grade for the course.

Q: Will I receive a letter grade for the field seminar?

A: Yes, MSW students will receive a grade.

Q: How is field graded?

A: You earn a grade, but it is issued to you by your practicum coordinator using the following criteria: 1) your field evaluation completed by your Field Instructor (80% of behaviors must be rated a 3 or higher to pass the course); 2) your webinar attendance, participation, engagement, and contribution; 3) completion of the required hours and requirements; 4) timely submission of ALL forms and other required assignments; 5) your adherence to all policies and procedures. Termination from practicum will result in a NC/E grade, and all assignments must be submitted to pass the course.

Q: How will I manage classes, field placement, my job, and life in general?

A: There is no doubt that good time management is critical as well as utilizing the support of family, friends, peers, and campus resources to help you manage what can be a very stressful year. The Office of Field Education, advisors and practicum coordinators are here to help you. Please don't hesitate to reach out to any of us.

For questions regarding University of Utah College of Social Work Field Education, please feel free to contact the office of field education.

*For inquiries regarding the MSW program, please contact Diane Buck:
diane.buck@socwk.utah.edu*

